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CHAPTER

22

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Emerging Technologies for Diagnosing Mild Traumatic Brain Injury AU:1

Carey Balaban, Kurt Yankaskas and Alex Kiderman AU:2

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION AU:4

s0010

p0010 Mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) has proven to be challenging to document objectively.¹ In the presence of a documented traumatic event (blunt trauma, acceleration deceleration, or blast energy exposure), it is defined primarily by the presence and persistence of symptoms that include difficulty thinking clearly, feeling slowed down, difficulty concentrating, difficulty remembering new information, headache, “pressure in the head”, neck pain, feeling slowed down or like “in a fog,” difficulty concentrating or remembering, confusion and/or drowsiness, fuzzy or blurry vision, nausea or vomiting (acutely), dizziness, sensitivity to light or noise, balance problems, feeling tired or having no energy, irritability, sadness, increased emotional lability, nervousness or anxiety, sleep disruptions (too much or too little), and trouble falling asleep.

p0015 By definition, there was, at worst, only a momentary change in conscious and there are no structural imaging findings showing intracranial injury. Emerging technologies, then, are needed to document functional deficits that are associated with the status of symptoms and objective clinical signs during acute, subacute, and chronic periods after injury.

p0020 Technologies for objective diagnosis of mTBI face several challenges. A first challenge is a clear differentiation between the empiricist approach of “finding markers” and the neuroscientific, precision-medicine goal of differentially diagnosing the biological bases for the underlying impairments. Even empirical biomarkers for “dinged and not quite right” need to be understood in terms of sites and mechanisms related to the injury and biological attempts to recover. Hence, is also essential that a selective and specific test battery is used to help identify the nature of the injury and track the clinical course in subacute and chronic post-injury periods in what is likely a very heterogeneous group. Are there specific and sensitive findings for injury that are nonlocalizing? Are there specific and sensitive localizing tests to refine a diagnosis? Are there specific and sensitive findings to document resolution of the symptoms and, more importantly, to indicate readiness for

partial, or complete, return to normal activities? One incontrovertible consideration, though, is that evidence of delivery of energy to the head remains a necessary contextual criterion for diagnosis of mTBI.

p0025 A second challenge is to transcend the temptation to limit testing to familiar contemporary technologies. For example, harmonic sinusoidal oscillation testing of the horizontal vestibulo-ocular reflex or an audiogram may be of limited utility as a specific tool for mTBI testing. Rather, one must consider developing assessment technologies that can illuminate the sources of symptoms and signs that: (1) appear spontaneously; (2) can resolve or transform over time; and (3) can be elicited by dynamic test challenges.

p0030 A third challenge is to design technologies that provide rapid, selective, and specific identification of individual patients as having definitive mTBI. This standard requires a test battery to clearly distinguish the affected individuals as outliers from the population termed unaffected, normal, or subclinical. Pragmatically, the test will distinguish affected from unaffected individuals with a history of energy delivery to the head. This level of performance is a persistent “devil in the detail” for emerging technologies; it is a far more rigorous standard than simply showing a significant difference between partially overlapping groups of positive and negative subjects. Adherence to this standard drives the technology development process beyond the mechanical empiricism of enumerating similarities and differences between presentations by markers. Rather, the biologic bases behind specific and sensitive become important clues for making scientific sense of the clinical status of affected individuals.

p0035 A fourth challenge is to disentangle the neurosensory consequences of cognition and cognitive effects of neurosensory processing deficits. For example, there are strong interactive comorbidities between balance dysfunction and anxiety,^{2,3} and interactions between vestibular dysfunction and cognitive performance.⁴ This is manifested more widely in concussion by potential interactions between comorbid sequelae of balance and other neurosensory deficits, psychiatric signs and symptoms, personality features, and cognitive signs and symptoms. This vexing issue was noted more than a decade ago when Moore et al.⁵ called for a concerted effort to move concussion from categorical classification to dimensional conceptualization. It was reiterated by Hoge et al.⁶ in reference to veterans with mTBI. The prevailing view has been to assess, as independent domains, neurocognitive function, self-reported symptoms, and postural (or balance) control.⁷

p0040 The tendency to somatize appears to be associated with a prolonged recovery from a concussion (defined by symptom reporting).^{8,9} Path analysis suggested that somatization has an influence postconcussive recovery by influencing symptom expression.⁸ Common sense appears to dictate that controls for propensity to self-report symptoms (and their persistence) need to be considered as part of any new assessment tools.

OBJECTIVE DIAGNOSTIC TECHNOLOGIES

s0015

s0020 Neurocognitive Tests and Symptom Inventories

p0045 The basic instruments for neurocognitive tests and symptom inventories are described in detail in a recent report of the IOM and NRC¹⁰ and were reviewed comprehensively by

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Arrieux et al.¹¹ These tests^{7,12,13} include the Intermediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Test (ImPACT[®]), King-Devick Test, Automated Neuropsychological Assessment Metrics (ANAM), Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (currently fifth edition, or SCAT5) and new products such as BrainCheck.¹⁴ They can be administered automatically on electronic devices (computer, tablet, or personal digital device). The neurocognitive or neuropsychological components require baseline testing and typically include timed performance assessments inspired by the classic Trail-Making Tests.^{15,16} The anecdotal reports that athletes who “low ball” their baseline performance reveal an inherent problem with operational use of these tests.

s0025 Symptom Inventories

p0050 The Post-Concussion Symptom Scale (PCSS, 25 items)¹⁷ and the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (5th edition, 22 items) symptom evaluation scale¹⁸ are validated tools in common use. They elicit the seven-point Likert scale responses to describe the severity of similar lists of symptoms (Table 22.1). The scales are used to generate global symptom scores as a proxy for impairment. Because symptom perceptions can be affected by comorbid psychiatric, emotional, and personality features,^{19,20} it is important to focus on instruments that can assess somatization^{8,9} and relevant psychological and psychiatric features, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory[®]-2 and Beck Depression Inventory.^{20,21} Other validated instruments are useful to examine the perceived impact of specific symptoms on activities and quality of life. For example, the Dizziness Handicap Inventory is a validated, 25-item instrument that uses a three-point ordinal scale to express the attribution of symptoms and perceived handicaps to dizziness.²²⁻²⁷ Hence, it is not surprising that DHI scores (and scores) showed reasonably strong positive correlation with responses to dizziness and mild cognitive impairment related items on the SCAT symptom inventory.²⁸ Other tests of the functional impact of symptoms, such as the Headache Impact Test (HIT-6t), are worthy of consideration for gauging impairment and improvement. A more general approach is represented by the recent efforts of the Patient-Reported Outcomes Information System (PROMIS) to develop a TBI Quality of Life (TBI-QOL) set of item banks focused on more severe forms of TBI.^{29,30} The development of quality-of-life items specifically tailored to acute, subacute, and chronic mTBI could be of considerable value for monitoring therapeutic outcomes and the assessment of readiness to return to normal activities.

p0055 Identification of symptom clusters and gender differences in symptom expression is one direction for a concerted effort to move from categorical classification to dimensional conceptualization of concussion, as called for more than a decade ago by Moore et al.⁵ Dimensional reduction by principal component or factor analysis of self-reporting symptom questionnaires are an approach for identifying symptom items associated with similar underlying dimensions. Table 22.1 shows published results of reductions from two studies, both utilizing groups of normal and acute TBI subjects.^{28,31} There are some strong similarities between the results, but also differences that may reflect differences in the items and the orders of common items on the two instruments. Factor analysis of PCSS responses, obtained within 7 days of injury, indicated a four-component solution after

AU:5

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

TABLE 22.1 Symptom Scales and Initial Identification of Symptom Dimensions or Clusters in mTBI

Symptom (Rated Item)	PCSS Position and (Cluster) From Factor Analysis	SCAT Position and (Cluster) From Principal Component Analysis	
Headache	1 (CogMigFatig)	1 (PTHx-M)	AU:9
Nausea	2 (CogMigFatig) (Somatic)		
Vomiting	3 (Som)	4 (Nauseated)	
Balance problems	4 (CogMigFatig)/(Somatic)	7 (Dizzy-MCog)	
Dizziness (spinning or moving sensation)	5 (CogMigFatig)/(Somatic)	5 (Dizzy-MCog)	
Fatigue	7 (CogMigFatig)	15 (PTHx-M)	
Trouble falling asleep	8 (Sleep)	22 (Emotional Lability)	
Drowsiness	11 (CogMigFatig)	17 (PTHx-M)	
Sensitivity to light	12 (CogMigFatig) (Som))	8 (PTHx-M)	
Sensitivity to noise	13 (CogMigFatig)	9 (PTHx-M)	
Irritability	14 (CogMigFatig)(Affect)	19 (Emotional Lability)	
Sadness	15 (Affect)	20 (Emotional Lability)	
Nervous/anxious	16 (Affect)	21 (Emotional Lability)	
Feeling more emotional than usual	17 (Affect)	18 (Emotional Lability)	
Feeling slowed down	19 (CogMigFatig)	10 (PTHx-M)	
Feeling like "in a fog"	20 (CogMigFatig)	11 (Cervicogenic)	
Difficulty concentrating	21 (CogMigFatig)	13 (Dizzy-MCog)	
Difficulty remembering	22 (CogMigFatig)	14 (Dizzy-MCog)	
Visual problems/blurred vision	23 (CogMigFatig) (Som)	6 (Dizzy MCog)	
Other	24		
Lightheadedness	6	–	AU:10
Sleeping more than usual	9 (CogMigFatig) (Sleep)	–	
Sleeping less than usual	10 (Sleep)	–	
Numbness or tingling	18 (Som)	–	
"Pressure in head"	–	2 (PTHx-M)	
Neck pain	–	3 (Cervicogenic)	
"Don't feel right"	–	12 (PTHx-M)	
Confusion	–	16 (Dizzy-MCog)	

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

mTBI, a cognitive-migraine-fatigue (CogMigFatig) factor, an affective (Affect) factor, a somatic (Somatic) factor a sleep-related (Sleep) factor.³¹ A principal component analysis of SCAT questionnaire within 6 days of injury, on the other hand, identified a posttraumatic headache/migraine (PTHx-M) cluster, a dizzy with mild cognitive impairment (Dizzy-MCog) cluster, an emotional lability cluster, a cervicogenic cluster and nausea.²⁸ Despite similar objective findings, female participants with mTBI showed higher scores than their male counterparts on the PTHx-M cluster, while males with mTBI reported higher scores on the Dizzy-MCog complex. These data motivate a deeper exploration of symptom dimensions in acute, subacute and chronic mTBI.

s0030 Resting Brain Network Activity

p0060 Structural imaging, including tractography,³²⁻³⁴ is expected to yield negative findings for mTBI. However, network science and network functional imaging^{35,36} have been proposed as promising approaches to measure objective changes in brain activity that underlie the signs and symptoms of mTBI. A first step has been examination of resting network activity from fMRI,³⁷ MEG,^{38,39} and EEG⁴⁰⁻⁴² recordings from patients with mTBI. These studies suggest that there may be modifications in activity between the default mode network (posterior cingulate cortex, inferior parietal cortex, inferolateral temporal cortex, and ventral anterior cingulate cortex) and frontal cortex,⁴³ which overlaps with the executive network (dorsolateral prefrontal and anterior cingulate cortex). A more recent study indicates that there are frequency specific differences in regional amplitude coupling in mTBI patients as well as augmented slow wave activity.⁴⁴ However, the correlational evidence linking these resting activity measures to the degree of cognitive impairment,⁴³ changes in emotional regulation and the persistence of posttraumatic complaints⁴⁵ is not strong.

s0035 Tests of Sensory Evoked Brain Activity in Specific Networks

p0065 Stimulus-evoked EEG activity has been used standardly for clinical evaluation of neurosensory processing. Commonly used diagnostic tests include evaluation of visual and auditory evoked potentials, which are conducted in conjunction with perceptual tests (e.g., perimetry and audiograms) to provide a more comprehensive clinical picture. Specialized visual and auditory sensory evoked potentials studies have shown some promise in documenting mTBI.

s0040 Auditory Processing

p0070 Metrics associated with central auditory processing are a very promising emerging area for assessment of mTBI. A proportion of Individuals with chronic blast mTBI⁴⁶ and concussions from blunt trauma show abnormal results on tests of central auditory processing, which includes speech comprehension in noise.^{46,47} A very interesting study has shown alterations in speech-evoked frequency-following responses (also called the auditory brainstem response to complex sounds, or cABR) in children who were tested during the subacute stage mTBI.⁴⁸ These findings motivate further development of objective metrics associated with processing and interpreting complex auditory information.

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

s0045 *Visual Evoked Potentials*

p0075 Chronic mTBI may show P100 latency delays (\pm 15%) or amplitude reductions, but normal ERPs.⁴⁹ Luminance affects latency and amplitude differentially in chronic mTBI patients versus controls.⁵⁰ It has also been shown that binasal occlusion and base-in prisms induce altered changes in patients with chronic mTBI (1-27 years prior to testing).⁵¹ These findings motivate further development of objective measures of the effects of mTBI on brain activity associated with complex visual information processing.

s0050 *Quantitative Neurologic, Neurotologic, and Neurophthalmologic Diagnosis*

p0080 The documentation of abnormal versional and vergence eye movements after mTBI has been a focus of a considerable research interest for more than a decade.⁵²⁻⁶¹ Technologies that incorporate some of these published results are available commercially. Here, the focus is on considerations for further test development, including oculomotor tests that incorporate cognitive tasks. AU:6

p0085 The temporal resolution, spatial resolution, and processing algorithms for eye tracking are essential technical considerations for precise and reproducible eye movement assessment. For video-oculographic methods, sampling at a rate of at least 500 Hz appears to be necessary to assess rapid eye movement timing and trajectories⁶²⁻⁶⁴; eye position resolution and precision should be {1 degree of arc for horizontal, vertical and torsional deviations. For slower eye movements, lower sampling rates (e.g., 100 Hz) are adequate.

p0090 Commercially available, advanced, video-based binocular eye tracking with infrared illumination systems currently provide independent, real time measurements for each eye at rates up to 250 Hz for horizontal and vertical movements and at rates up to 100 Hz for torsional eye movements. Video techniques generally use dark pupil tracking with detection algorithms for either the pupil centroid or an assumption of the pupil as an ellipse. Advanced eye tracking software uses a symmetric mass center algorithm that is designed to provide more accurate measurements when the pupil area is partially occluded.

p0095 Anti-saccade and predictive saccade tasks are examples of oculomotor tests with an embedded task that have proven to be useful in detecting mTBI objectively.^{52,54,65,66} Antisaccade task performance can be regarded as a core executive function of response inhibition.⁶⁷ An enhanced prosaccadic error rate in subjects with acute mTBI may suggest disruption of inhibitory networks that are critical for suppressing the prosaccade. The inhibitory contributions likely involve the frontal cortex, as well as output from substantia nigra and pars reticulata to the superior colliculus and thalamus.⁶⁷ Like other saccades, an antisaccade is thought to be programmed in the frontal cortex. The predictive saccade task, on the other hand, is related to networks controlling timing of movements guided by short-term memory cues, including crus I of the cerebellum, medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, posterior insula, and parahippocampal gyrus.⁶⁸ Because reactive saccades differentially engage a network that is related to oculomotor execution,⁶⁸ reactive and predictive saccade performance has differential diagnostic value for objective detection of damaged cortical pathways.

p0100 Anomalous convergence eye movements have been described in TBI patients on the basis of qualitative and semiquantitative observations and quantitative oculographic

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

metrics.^{55,57,58,61} Demonstrations of convergence insufficiency have typically focused on the range of effective responses to static endpoints (near and far targets).^{55,57,58} The results of analyses of convergence performance with oculographic methods in a diverse group of TBI patients⁶¹ suggest that dynamic assessment is a promising line of investigation for differential diagnosis.

- p0105 Inspection of the consensual pupillary light reflex is a component of standard neurologic exams. More recently, commercially available pupillometers can record the time course of the pupillary constriction and subsequent dilation (relaxation) objectively. Metrics for performance have included the onset latency and dynamic assessments of the velocity and magnitude of the response. A recent review⁶⁹ provides a comprehensive characterization of the current state-of-the-art. It is suggested that a more parsimonious and mechanistically insightful analyses could emerge by estimating parameters of formal models of the dynamics of these responses⁷⁰⁻⁷⁵ in mTBI patients and matched control groups. AU:7
- p0110 The near response is a coordinated motor program of disconjugate eye movements, pupil size changes, and lens accommodation. The near triad movement⁷⁶ is a coordinated execution of convergent eye movements, pupillary constriction (miosis), and increased lens curvature to track an approaching object. Divergent eye movement, pupillary dilation, and decreased lens curvature occur while tracking a receding object. On-going studies suggest that mTBI can be detected through an examination of the coordination of eye and pupil movements during a binocular disparity tracking task.
- p0115 Static and dynamic posturography have become standard tools in the assessment of balance disorders. Hence, they have been used for assessing postural control disorders in mTBI (see, e.g.,⁷⁷⁻⁷⁹). The method has been useful to document objectively acute, subacute, and chronic emergent and/or a persistent sign of mTBI is responses to step or sinusoidal perturbations of the substrate or visual surround. Notable areas for development are the expanded use of measures such as approximate or Shannon entropy⁸⁰⁻⁸² to characterize system performance and applying ternary pseudorandom perturbations⁸³ to rapidly measure the transfer function for postural control.
- p0120 Gait analysis has also been applied to assess anomalous locomotion after mTBI. Earlier studies in patients with moderate TBI (grade II concussion) demonstrated the utility of dual task cognitive paradigms for revealing gait disorders,⁸⁴ which was consistent with the emerging picture of the utility of multiple task challenges for gait assessment in other neurological disorders.⁸⁵ Based upon this earlier literature, more recent studies show promising results with applying dual task paradigms in patients with mTBI.^{86,87}

s0055 Autonomic Function

- p0125 The exacerbation of symptoms of mTBI by exercise has motivated examination of changes in autonomic motor control after injury. The high frequency relative power of heart rate variability was reported to be reduced during physical exertion in patients with chronic mTBI.⁸⁸ In a small sample of athletes, approximate entropy (a measure of complexity of beat-to-beat variability) was depressed transiently in the acute period after mTBI.⁸⁹ It is of further interest that altered patterns of heart rate variability may be a component of (developing) comorbid conditions such as anxiety.⁹⁰

IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

s0060 **Olfactory System Function**

p0130 Olfactory dysfunction has been documented for some patients with mTBI after either blast-wave exposure^{91,92} or blunt-trauma exposures.⁹³⁻⁹⁵ The olfactory system is, in fact, positioned strategically as a sentinel for head injury. The direct exposure of the olfactory epithelium and nerves to ambient air within the nasal cavity confers vulnerability to blast waves, particulate debris, and aerosols from explosions. Bone transmission of energy from impact to the ethmoid bone is another source of potential trauma to the nerves. The olfactory bulb and nerves also play an important role in glymphatic drainage into the lymphatic system.⁹⁶ The relatively superficial location of the olfactory bulb, tracts, and piriform cortex also may confer vulnerability for impact to the skull.

p0135 Olfactory testing approaches include threshold or suprathreshold Identification tests with a standardized set of odorant stimuli (e.g., Sniffin' Stickst or the Alberta Smell Test).⁹⁷ Results from limited studies suggested efficacy in detecting acute mTBI,⁹³ and that olfactory test results may have some prognostic capability for detection of residual brain dysfunction in longer term, follow-up neurological examinations.⁹¹ Similarly, it was reported that acute olfactory dysfunction may be associated with an elevated likelihood of adverse cognitive, neuropsychiatric, and functional outcomes during longer term follow-ups.⁹⁵ The current technologies have the advantage of simplicity, but the test-retest reliability is lower than for standard oculomotor and vestibular testing.⁹⁷ Further studies are clearly needed to explore the roles of olfactory tests in screening batteries.

s0065 **Biochemical Markers**

p0140 Considerable effort has been invested in identifying reliable blood or cerebrospinal biochemical markers for mTBI from among markers for moderate and severe injury, with no definitive outcomes.⁹⁸⁻¹⁰⁰ To date, the most definitive finding may be that some biomarkers help acutely in detecting the potentially CT-positive individuals among those who appear to be mild clinically. For example, Sharma et al.¹⁰¹ reported that blood levels of the gelatinase, matrix metalloproteinase-2, C-reactive protein, and creatinine kinase type B can help differentiate CT-positive from CT-negative patients from samples drawn at an average of 7-10 hours post-injury. Prognostic applications seem to be a promising direction for biomarker technology development.

s0070 **FUTURE DIRECTIONS: TOWARD INTEGRATIVE PRECISION MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS**

p0145 A review of the emerging technologies for detecting and monitoring the course of mTBI suggests that we are still at a very rudimentary stage for developing comprehensive, rational approaches that illuminate the underlying neurobiology of the condition. However, there are promising indications that a combination of refined symptom inventories, objective tests of higher order neurological and cognitive functions, and sentinel biomarker tests can be both diagnostic in the short-term for the severity of impairment and prognostic for the likelihood of subacute and chronic complications. We can now envision test systems

that integrate dual-tasking, virtual/augmented reality and accelerometer technologies for more challenging, and ecologically valid clinical testing. The same advanced test systems will doubtless see wide usage in the rehabilitation sciences, as well. A major caveat, though, is that the development of these precision technologies will require rigorous attention to patient stratification criteria and both temporal and functional milestones that are critical to monitoring the clinical course of the individual.

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IV. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

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Abstract

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